

Shout

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lee Papa', written over the printed name.

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Shout
A Creative Piece

Abstract

This short story is an examination of an event that occurred in 1967 and 1968 in Muncie, Indiana. This event has many names: race riot, racial disturbances, fighting. No matter what name is used, the fact is that African-American students and white students fought in the hallways of Southside High School. This story focuses on the many feelings and voices surrounding the riots.

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Introduction

During the spring semester of 2001, I have been fortunate enough to be involved in a seminar sponsored by the Virginia Ball Seminar for Creative Inquiry. I devoted a full semester to earn fifteen credits. The class included Telecommunications majors, History majors, English majors, Journalism majors, and Education majors. Our task for the semester was to create a multi-media play involving video and live actors. We did extensive research and interviewed community members. The focus of the play was race relations in Muncie, particularly an event that happened at Southside High School in Muncie in 1967 and 1968. The event that occurred at the school has had many names: race riot, racial disturbances, fighting. No matter what name is given to the event, the fact is that fighting occurred in the hallways of the school between white students and African-American students.

We first learned of the history of Indiana and Muncie, giving us a better understanding of the types of people that live in the area. We also learned about African-American history in Indiana. We traveled to Birmingham, Alabama to visit the Civil Rights Institute, Kelly Ingram Park, and the 16th Street Baptist Church. The class did archival research in the Civil Rights Institute and the Birmingham Public Library. We were also able to speak with some people involved in the civil rights era.

We then learned about ethnography in order to help us study the community of Muncie. We also did research in the Middletown archives, finding useful information concerning the riots. The class then traveled to Chicago to attend writing and acting workshops, and to study plays.

This brought us to the interviewing process. As a class we interviewed thirty-four people from the Muncie community, all on digital video or audio. All consultants (interviewees) were students, educators, or community members during the time of the

riots. Hurley Goodall, well-known politician from Muncie, worked closely with us and was also interviewed. Current high school students were interviewed to give a perspective on the current views of race relations.

Transcripts were written for each interviews. During the course of the semester, all of us kept a journal to relay stories about ourselves and what we had learned. Using the research, journal entries, and transcripts, the play *Class Pictures* was written and revised several times. Video segments taken from the actual interviews were edited to be used during the play. A staged reading will be performed April 29, 2001 and May 1, 2001.

I personally interviewed four consultants. Connie Clary, Mike Clary, and Frank Chandler all attended Southside in 1967 and 1968. They all saw the fighting that occurred or were involved in the fighting. Brad Jackson attended Central High School during this time. He related many insightful stories about race relations in Muncie. I studied all thirty-four transcripts in order to create the video montages that are weaved in between scenes performed by actors. These video montages centered around the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., the Confederate flag as the school flag at Southside High School during the time of the riots, interracial dating, and the riots themselves.

Through research and interviews I created the short story, *Shout*. While the characters are fictional, I strongly based them on individuals that were interviewed. I also used transcripts taken in 1968 from John Gulden, Lee Greenleaf, and David Dollison. All three were involved in the riots. This is a story about riots, the feelings surrounding the riots, and the voices that came out of the riots.

Shout

by Nicole Bixler

Susan heard a car pull up to the house. She placed a bookmark inside her book and walked over to the window. She could see the woman sitting in her red Escort, her hand flicking cigarette ashes out the window. This should be an interesting afternoon, she thought.

Finally, the doorbell rang and Susan opened the door. The woman was young, close to her daughter's age. She was smiling warmly, hugging a notebook and a tape recorder.

Susan invited her in, the woman thanking her once again for letting her come talk to her. The woman told Susan that people today still don't understand different races, and that race relations are still a problem. Her class project would be a study of the lives of people of many different races in a hope that everyone would have a greater understanding of each other. The woman told Susan that it was important that her voice be heard, considering she had experienced race riots at her high school in 1967. Susan sat back in her chair, her mind starting to drift back in time. She told the woman that if she was ready to listen, she was ready to speak.

* * *

Susan's fingers moved rapidly up and down her flute, as she breathed along with the rhythm of her school fight song. When the song came to an end she yelled, "Go Rebels!" along with the rest of the band. The kids and parents standing in the bleachers screamed and cheered as two students ran across the track with a gigantic Confederate flag. The crowd yelled "Go Muncie Southside!" as the football players ran onto the field.

The second half began while the cheerleaders led everyone in a cheer for the "Mighty Rebels Defense!". Suddenly two hands covered Susan's eyes. "Guess who", a male voice said. Susan giggled. "Um, Paul Newman?"

"Ha! Yeah right Paul Newman," said Debbie, one of Susan's best friends in band.

"Sshhh! Don't say anything, Debbie! Guess again, Susie Q" "Uh, give me a hint." "Okay, how about the best looking guy at Southside."

Debbie laughed. Susan bit her lip, pretending to be puzzled and trying not to giggle. "I just don't know who in the world it could be!"

The hands left Susan's eyes as a face with a big smile appeared in front of her. Susan giggled at her friend Billy as he grabbed her flute and blew into it, making awful noises. "Stop! Give it back!" Susan tried to grab it, with the help of Debbie. "Go back up there behind your drum, Billy!" both the girls demanded, while giggling.

"All right, all right. I see how it is," Billy said. He had a smirk on his face. "Debbie, are you coming out with us tonight?" he asked.

"Going to the Black Bag?" Debbie asked.

"Yeah, yeah. You can ride with me and John. Oh, and don't forget the meeting with Reverend Davidson tomorrow."

"Oh, believe me I won't forget", Debbie answered. Billy messed up Susan's hair as he ran back up to his spot.

Susan twirled her flute around in her hands. She looked up at Debbie. "I want to go to the Black Bag sometime." She stood up and screamed, "Yea Rebels!", as the football team stole the ball. Debbie sighed.

Quietly she answered, "Now, what would people think if they knew you went to the Black Bag?"

Susan shrugged her shoulders. "I really don't care. If people have a problem with it, that's too bad. You are one of my closest friends."

Debbie shook her head. "Susan, that's in band. No one cares in band. Outside of that, it's different. Look through the stands. The blacks sit in one section and the whites sit in another. And that's everybody's *choice*." Susan twirled her flute.

"Besides, maybe the kids at the Black Bag don't want a white girl hanging out," Debbie said. Susan looked at her in disbelief as the crowd cheered, waving tiny Confederate flags.

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Susan took apart her flute and placed the pieces in her case. She walked across the band room to talk to Billy and Debbie before her next class. The two were talking quietly together. Susan didn't want to interrupt, so she stood behind them and waited.

"Reverend Davidson's right. We shouldn't have to put up with things anymore," Debbie said.

"Yeah, there's definitely a reason why we don't have *any* black cheerleaders or black kids on student council," Billy said.

"They won't let us join anything. They don't want us anywhere near them, unless it's on the field or the court."

"And the teachers could care less. Principal Lewis doesn't care. It's time to they noticed us."

"Yeah, it's time they listened."

Susan realized she shouldn't have been listening. Do Billy and Debbie really feel that badly? she wondered. It was true that there were only whites in most of the clubs. There were African-Americans in band, and there were African-Americans on the football team, basketball team, and track. Susan saw how the whites and blacks were separated at Southside. She had always accepted it, though. It wasn't that she thought it was right. In band, there was no division. But she thought that was the way it would always be. She thought that the African-American kids had accepted it, too. Maybe not, she thought.

* * *

Susan held her lunch tray on top of her math book as she waited in line to pay. A boy bumped into her, almost making her drop her food.

"Hey, watch where you're going!" someone yelled. Susan rolled her eyes. That someone happened to be Jack Miller. Out of the corner of her eye she could see the grin on his face as he walked toward her. She started studying the green beans on her tray, hoping he would go away.

"Hey Susan! Let me hold on to your book for you." Susan gave him a faint smile as he slid the book out from under her tray.

"Where are you sittin'? You can sit with me if you want."

"Uh, I have a math test today. I'm going to sit with some people and study." Susan grabbed her book back from him. Jack Miller was not an academic student, like herself. He left school early everyday to work in a print shop. He and his friends were not part of Susan's crowd. She turned her head away, hoping to end it, but Jack persisted on.

"I, um, was wondering if, um . . ." Jack's hands were stuffed into his pockets, and his feet squirmed around on the floor. Susan held her breath in, not wanting to hear the words.

"Well, I was wonderin' if you wanted to do somethin' Friday night." Jack looked her in the eye, chewing on his lip. "Oh, well, I have the football game. Sorry," Susan said as she let out her breath.

"Well, how 'bout after the game? We can go to the Burger Chef." Susan didn't have any plans, but she didn't want to go out with Jack Miller, either. She pictured herself, driving around aimlessly with Jack and his friends as they drank and yelled at people. She was disgusted.

"Look, I really can't. I, um, already promised I would hang out with some other people." Susan waited for Jack to finally give up and leave. Instead his eyes squinted and he moved closer to her.

"You're gonna hang out with those negro kids, aren't you? You know, they think they're so much better than everyone else all of sudden. They're dressing weird with those robes, wearing those black gloves. They got that Black Bag place, promoting black power and all that stuff. You

really shouldn't be hangin' out with them. And that Billy Jones kid, he's like the leader of it all. He's pissin' everybody off." Jack turned and walked away.

Susan held her mouth open. She looked across the cafeteria at Billy and Debbie. They were sitting with the other African-American kids, talking and laughing. Billy looked over at Susan and waved. Susan gave a small wave back and then smiled. She didn't care what Jack Miller thought. But she couldn't stop that uneasy feeling churning in her stomach. She wanted to just walk across the cafeteria and sit down by Billy and Debbie. But she knew she wouldn't.

* * *

Susan swirled her mashed potatoes with her fork. Her father was hungrily stuffing chicken into his mouth. Her mother was reading a magazine. The radio was softly playing the song, "To Sir, With Love"

"Do you that the black people in town think they're better than everyone else, because of, you know, all that black power stuff?" Susan asked. Her mother looked up from her magazine with big eyes. Her father had stopped chewing and stared at Susan. A piece of chicken fell from his mouth onto his plate.

"Excuse me?" her father asked. Susan shifted in her chair.

"Oh, I don't know. It's just that some people at school think the black kids are acting weird and they don't like it. I don't think they are. I like Billy and Debbie better than anyone else. I think they are both really starting to feel bad, though." Her parents looked at each other.

"Susan, we've always instilled in you the fact that no one is different. We are all human beings, it doesn't matter what we look like. These are tense times, though, and some people are not very open-minded. So, just be yourself. Don't worry about everyone else," her mother answered.

"Your mother's right. You just need to stand up for what you believe. Your school is full of

a bunch of racist rednecks. We always hoped you would be better than that. And you are, Sus.”

Susan’s mother started to say something to her father, but then she turned to Susan.

“Look, I know you realize that there are some kids who really treat people like Billy and Debbie badly. But you need to keep being a good friend to those two, no matter what, okay?”

“Yeah, I know,” Susan replied. Her mother went back to reading her magazine, and her father continued eating. Her parents made it sound so easy. She hoped they were right.

* * *

Susan marched, knees slightly up, holding her flute perfectly straight. The marching leader held the school flag up high, the bars and stripes rippling in the air. Susan’s band leader blew his whistle to stop, and everyone scattered on the football field for a break.

“Hey, Susie Q!” Billy said as he twirled his drum sticks with his fingers. “Hey, Billy. How was your day?” Susan asked as they both sat on the ground. Before he could answer, Debbie kneeled down in front of them.

“Billy, I have to talk to you.” She punched her knees with her fists. Susan asked her what was wrong. Debbie ignored her, looking directly at Billy.

“What is it, Debbie?” “Mr. Barnes wants me to carry the flag this weekend for the game!” She sat up on her knees. Susan wrinkled her eyebrows.

“Why isn’t Molly?” Billy asked. “Because she has some family thing, so I have to carry it in front of everyone!”

“I can’t believe this! You told him you wouldn’t do it, didn’t you?” Billy exclaimed. “He told me there was no one else to do it, I didn’t have a choice.”

Billy stood up. “This is bullshit!” Susan stood up, too. “Why are you so upset? I’ll carry the flag if you don’t want to.”

“Susan, you don’t even get it!” Debbie yelled. Susan looked down at the grass. Debbie

had never yelled at her before.

Billy paced back and forth. "We have to tell Reverend Davidson about this. Like he said, no one in this town gives a shit about us."

"What are you talking about? Just answer me," Susan pleaded.

Debbie stood in front of Susan. "You want to know what we're talking about? We're talking about racist white people, Susan. All of you think you can just run over every black person. You think you can just ignore us, that we'll just put up with it. Well, we're not going to put up with it anymore!" Debbie turned around and ran off the football field. Susan put her hands over her eyes, not wanting Billy to see her cry.

Billy laid his hand on her shoulder. Susan turned away from him. "Susie, she didn't mean you." Billy pulled on her arm so that she faced him.

"I've never done anything! You're both my friends. I've never seen us as different." Susan said. She sighed as Billy looked at her, not saying anything.

"Yeah Susie, I know it's like that between us. But you are different than everyone else at Southside. Debbie and me and the other black kids have put up with a lot of shit for a long time. I mean, the fucking school flag is a symbol of slavery and racism! Our school symbol is the Southside Rebels! Do know how that makes us feel?"

"I didn't . . ."

"Yeah, you didn't know. You know, it's great Susan that you don't see a difference between us. But not knowing, not understanding is worse." Susan stood completely still. Billy stepped closer to her.

"There may be some trouble. Be careful, okay? Remember, you're white." Susan opened her mouth to say something, but no sound would come out.

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The bell rang, warning everyone that they should be in class. Jack Miller didn't care that classes had started. He decided to be late so that he could catch a glimpse of Susan in the band room. He sauntered down the empty hallway. As he passed in front of the cafeteria, he felt someone behind him. At that moment, something rammed into the back of his head. He whipped around and swung, his fist smashing into a nose. Jack stopped. He had hit Billy Jones. Jack ran down the hallway, straight to his history class, breathing hard, not planning to say a word.

Susan had been picked to hand out nurse's passes that week. She came out of the office holding the passes in her hand. As she walked down the hallway leading to the cafeteria, she looked through the notes to find out where she needed to take them. She slowed her walk as she heard the sound of sneakers rubbing against the tiled floor. As she lifted her head her eyes met the eyes of seventy African-American boys walking toward her. They were walking fiercely, almost running. Some had sticks in their fists, others had knives. Susan froze in the middle of the hallway. She felt her blood stop in her veins. She turned around to go the other way. As she did, she saw a huge crowd of white boys marching toward her. They, too, had sticks and knives. Standing in the middle, both crowds drawing closer, she felt someone pick her up around the waist. The boy carrying her ran, opened a classroom door, and threw Susan inside. She landed on her arm as the boy said, "Don't move!" and slammed the door.

Billy ran down the stairs, holding his hand to his nose to stop it from bleeding. As he came around the corner, a group of white kids jumped on him. Fists and sticks hit him on the back, arms, stomach, and head. They let up when a group of African-American kids ran over. All of a sudden the hallway disappeared. Legs kicked knees, elbows rammed stomachs. Arms swung Lava soap stuffed into socks. Two by fours crashed into skin, bones.

Billy did everything he could to stay standing. He knew that if he stopped hitting for one second, he would end up on the floor, in trouble. Suddenly, Billy couldn't breathe. Everyone started coughing. Billy saw that there were police, and that they had sprayed tear gas. People started opening windows. Some climbed out of them. Billy turned and saw a policeman holding

back a girl's arm. It was Debbie. Her glasses were laying on the floor. She struggled to get out of the policeman's grip, kicking her legs, but another policeman sprayed gas in her eyes. Billy tried to run toward her, but then he was sprayed in the face. He screamed, cussing at the policemen. Somebody grabbed his hands, pulling them behind him.

* * *

Susan lifted her face from her knees. Finally things had quieted down. She felt sick to her stomach from all the noise, the shouting. She got up and cracked the classroom door open. No one seemed to be in the hallways. She opened the door all the way and stepped outside. There were papers scattered everywhere. Sticks were lying on the floor. Locker doors were opened with books spilling out. Susan slowly crept through the hallway. Looking down she noticed blood on the floor. The loudspeaker came on. Principal Lewis told everyone to go home. As people poured out of classrooms and onto the sidewalks outside, Susan forced herself not to cry.

* * *

Susan laid on the couch, watching a news report about Vietnam with her father. Her mother was in the kitchen washing dishes. No one spoke. Susan wasn't paying attention to the show. She couldn't stop thinking about what had happened. When Billy told her there was going to be trouble, she never imagined that her own classmates would fight each other.

The doorbell rang. Susan's father stood up from his chair to answer the door. He yelled that there was someone to see Susan. Maybe it's Billy, she thought. She couldn't stop worrying about him all day. Susan quickly scurried to the door. She groaned and closed her eyes for a moment before asking Jack Miller what he was doing at her house.

"I came by to make sure you're okay."

"I've been better." Susan tapped her foot on the floor.

"Yeah? Um, you want to get somethin' to eat?"

"I already had dinner."

"Oh, you goin' to school tomorrow?"

"Yeah."

"Oh, I think I'm skippin'. You know, I don't want to get hurt again." Susan stopped tapping her foot.

"What do you mean?"

"Someone hit me." Jack pointed to the back of his head. Susan's eyes widened.

"Whoa, that's crazy."

"Yeah, there was a lot of crazy stuff goin' on." Jack stood at the door, staring at Susan.

Neither said anything. Susan just wanted Jack to leave.

"Yeah, look Jack, I need to go back inside. Sorry you got hurt."

"Oh, okay. Um, hey, did you know that Billy Jones and that negro girl with the glasses both got arrested?"

"What! Billy and Debbie!" Susan's heart was pounding like a bass drum.

"Yeah, they deserve it, too. Especially that Billy kid. It's time those negro kids got taught a lesson." Susan's skin felt hot. She swallowed hard.

"You know what, Jack? You need to leave right now." Jack started to protest. Susan's father walked up behind her and put his hand on the door frame.

"She's right, son, you need to leave right now. And I don't want to see you back here again."

Jack quickly looked at Susan, and then climbed down the steps. Before he left, he turned his head.

"Nigger lovers!" he growled and then sprinted down the street.

* * *

Susan walked through the front doors of Southside High School. She gripped her flute case tightly. What would she say? Would she be able to look anyone in the eye? As she walked to her locker, she noticed that the sounds in the hallway had changed. It was so quiet. Voices were muffled. As she flipped through her locker combination, she saw a group of three girls walking together. Suddenly, a policeman placed his hands on two of the girls' shoulders.

"You need to walk separately. No more than two people are allowed to walk together," he said.

"You mean because we're black? Think we're gonna start a race riot Mister Policeman?" one of the girls said.

"The rule goes for everybody. Black or white. Now separate and get to class." The girls reluctantly parted, scowling, and walked off. Great, now our school is a prison, Susan thought. She shut her locker and started toward her math class. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Debbie standing at her locker. Thank God she's alright, Susan thought. She ran over.

"Debbie!" Susan smiled as Debbie turned around, but the smile wasn't returned.

"Debbie?" Susan said quietly. Debbie sighed. "What?" Susan frowned.

"I just wanted to let you know that I'm glad you're okay." Debbie turned toward her locker and continued to rummage through it.

"Look, I know that it's kind of weird, with everything that happened. But I still want to be friends."

Debbie whipped around.

"Billy got expelled." Her chin jutted out and her lips were pursed.

"No! That's so unfair! He can't be kicked out!" Susan yelled. She slumped against a locker.

"Yeah, well that's how it always is. You see it more clearly now?" Debbie slammed her

locker shut. She started off down the hallway. Susan quickly caught up to her.

"Debbie, we have been friends for a long time. I value your friendship. You are a wonderful person. I am so sorry that I didn't understand what you and Billy have had to go through." Debbie looked down. She didn't say anything.

"I'm sorry that I didn't know. I guess I didn't want to know. I just accepted things, and I shouldn't have. Don't you think we can still be friends? We can pretend nothing has changed." Debbie looked up at Susan.

"Everything has changed. Maybe people will listen now." Susan gave a small nod. Debbie looked down the hallway. Then she smiled softly at Susan. Susan smiled back. A policeman walked up to them.

"Girls, you need to break this up. Get to class now." Susan and Debbie looked at each other and gave a small laugh.

"You caught me just in time. I was about to hit her with my math book!" Debbie said.

"Yeah, and I was going to kick her in the knees!" They both started laughing. The policeman glared at them, started to say something, but then walked away. Debbie and Susan giggled as they rushed down the hall to class.

* * *

The woman sat in front of Susan shaking her head. She told Susan that it was an amazing account of racial discord. She asked Susan if she believed things were better now for her children and if racial tension had been solved. She held the tape recorder near Susan's mouth. Susan told her that, yes, things were better, but they still had a long way to go. She hoped her children would not have to shout to be heard.